

February 25, 1965

To Coordinators, Section Leaders, and Chapter Leaders:

As you know, we have leaned over backwards, ever since the Society was formed, to avoid criticizing other groups or leaders who appeared to be, or even claimed to be, fighting the Communists in their own way. We have cooperated with and supported, as well as we could, all such groups which we ourselves felt were honestly opposing Communism. And we have ignored many vicious, extensive, and long continued attacks on ourselves, both open and undercover, on the part of several of these groups — both because there is no room or time in this fight for personal resentments, and also to do all we could to minimize friction and feuding in the whole Conservative movement.

Reluctantly, and after long hesitation, therefore, we have come to the conclusion that our responsibility to our membership requires us to issue the following statement: We do not recommend the support by our members of the programs or activities of Mr. Richard Cotten. Our reasons include the following:

1. Mr. Cotten's sponsorship of Kilsoo Haan.

Born in Siberia of Korean parents, Mr. Haan has spent most of his life in China, Japan, and then the United States. He has been a lifelong enemy of Syngman Rhee. During the early years of World War II Mr. Haan ingratiated himself into a position of influence with members of our State Department in Washington; used that influence all he could to undermine the prestige and following of Rhee; and thus provided Rhee's enemies in our government with the argument that Rhee's plans and hopes for a Republic of Korea, independent of both Japan and the Communists, should not be supported, *because the Koreans themselves were too divided*. (Which was not true. The eventual elections proved the Korean people to be overwhelmingly behind Syngman Rhee.)

Mr. Haan was for ten years a regular and important contributor to the bilingual Korean-English newspaper, *Korean Independence*, which began publication in Los Angeles in about 1943. The House Committee on Un-American Activities, in its annual report for 1955, stated that "*Korean Independence* is exclusively a vehicle for Communist Party propaganda." Syngman Rhee himself on being pressured by officials of our State Department to form a "coalition" with Kilsoo Haan, once replied that in his (Rhee's) judgment, to unite with Haan would have no other effect than to encourage the Korean Communists. There is a great deal more to the unsavory story of Kilsoo Haan and his associates. But the net result is that no really informed anti-Communist with careful judgment would touch Kilsoo Haan with a ten-foot pole.

2. Mr. Cotten's support of PRAY.

The initials stand for Paul Revere Associated Yeomen, Inc. of New Orleans. Typical of PRAY's rabble-raising approaches is their published newsletter of March 22, 1964, which predicted categorically that Conservatives would sweep the 1964 elections but that the Reds would then and therefore try to seize control of our country immediately by force. This PRAY release was filled with warnings such as the following:

"Consult with your next door neighbors on HOW best to protect your family and home. Arrange to wear certain kinds of caps or shirts for identification; so you won't be firing at one another in the confusion. Do NOT organize the whole block in your neighborhood, as 10% of the people are probably on the OTHER side — trained for "leadership" of such neighborhood groups, to sell you into do-nothing surrender. Be your own LEADER of your own household . . . and make it an ARMED ARSENAL!"

"But BE SURE you have a TWO-WEEKS SUPPLY of food and water on hand! If NOT, you'll WISH YOU HAD!"

"But DON'T wait until November! The Reds would CERTAINLY beat us to the punch, when they see a CERTAIN Conservative win coming next November. They most probably EXPECT IT ALREADY!"

"This entire battle will come to a climax by November."

3. Mr. Cotten's support of *The Minutemen*.

We would have allowed the fact that, and the extent to which, we so completely disagree with the plans and purposes of *The Minutemen* to remain a matter of private opinion, had not Mr. Robert DePugh, founder and head of the group, used the pages of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, on June 22, 1964, to publicize specific falsehoods and general misinformation concerning his former relations with the Society. We immediately corrected his statements, in the June 23 issue of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, and then covered the whole matter in our August Bulletin. In the meantime, Mr. Cotten had used most of his July 14, 1964 CONSERVATIVE VIEWPOINT to praise and quote from "Bob DePugh and the MINUTEMEN."

Now Mr. Cotten and Mr. DePugh have a perfect right to hold and preach their views, and even the views of PRAY — at least if they stop short of promoting or leading guerrilla activities by armed bands. But these are not the views of The John Birch Society as to how this struggle can be and must be won; and they are not conducive to support of Mr. Cotten by the Society.

4. Mr. Cotten's threatened action against the "building and loan" industry.

In a letter dated April 23, 1964, on his *Conservative Viewpoint* stationery, Mr. Cotten said: "As an arch conservative, I just attended the Congress of Freedom in Birmingham, Alabama and during a conversation with a resident of that community I brought up the matter of my dislike of the building and loan and particularly their influence in California, which I feel to be virtually diabolic . . . the building and loan in California is simply taking all the money of widows for the higher banking rate of interest. They are getting dangerous, indeed, and I have seriously considered blowing the whistle on it, as it were . . . I feel the building and loan is a trap and inevitably people will

lose their shirt! . . . I am of the firm opinion that if by carefully planting seeds in programs here over possibly a week-two-week period, I could start a major panic in the building and loan. At least in the West here where it needs it so badly."

Mr. Cotten has expressed these same views on many occasions. Again, he has a perfect right to do so. But we see no reason why he should be helped to propagate them, or implement them, by members of The John Birch Society.

5. Mr. Cotten's love of sensationalism.

He believes in "tell 'em what will get 'em excited, and stir 'em to action — and contributions." He says that he can reach, and bring into the fight, people who will not even listen to us, because we are too mild and restrained. (These statements are as nearly and exactly verbatim as I can recall them, from the one conversation we ever had together. He was quite serious, and has proved by his actions and broadcasts that he certainly meant what he said.)

Mr. Cotten has a right to establish his own policies, and it is not our duty or desire even to argue about them except as they involve ourselves. But since we are so "mild and restrained," — which will undoubtedly come as quite a surprise to Nelson Rockefeller — I see no reason why we should subscribe to these policies of Mr. Cotten, or recommend him and his methods to our members.

6. Mr. Cotten's attacks on The John Birch Society.

These have been going on undercover for a long time, even while he was praising the Society openly on his broadcasts — obviously in order to win financial and moral support from our members. His chief method here has been the clandestine circulation of a printed sheaf, running twenty-one legal-size pages of typewriter type, or about ten thousand words, entitled: "The SMEAR of Richard Cotten by The John Birch Society COORDINATORS in the State of California."

Mr. Cotten, when he was just getting started in his anti-Communist activities in Bakersfield, California, joined The John Birch Society. Later, he resigned; primarily it appears over criticism by some of our members and Coordinators about what they considered his "anti-Semitic" views and activities. He makes much out of the fact that the very man who first brought him into the Society — one of our ablest and most dedicated members in Bakersfield, and who arranged my two-day seminar there a few years ago — became one of his most severe critics. And he makes even more out of the fact that our Coordinator at the time he joined, and who became very friendly with him in those early weeks or months wrote a letter a year or so later, after this Coordinator had been transferred to our Home Office in Boston, in which this Coordinator said: "Without going into detail, and without attempting to evaluate Mr. Cotten's purposes or objectives, let me simply state that I cannot remember a single worthwhile and lasting contribution that he added to the Conservative Movement in the Bakersfield area. This is obviously and unfortunately true despite the fact that he appeared to spend all of his time promoting the Conservative causes, despite his radio broadcasts, and despite the assistance he received from several Conservative leaders in Southern California. I mention this point, rather than discussing any damage Mr. Cotten may have done, because I feel that this absence of a positive contribution is more obvious and more important."

The simple truth is that both this Coordinator, and the influential member referred to above, had sharply changed their opinions of Mr. Cotten on getting to know him better. And since they, and others like them, were compelled by circumstances and by inquiries, to say so, Mr. Cotten considered that he was being smeared.

It would take more space than we have to write, and more time than you have to read, an analysis of this 21-page document, adequate to set the record straight. Mr. Thomas Hill, our National Director of Field Activities, tells me that in his opinion 25% of Mr. Cotten's complaints have some basis in fact and are reasonably justified. And we are very sorry that this should be even one percent true. But we believe it was primarily a lack of good judgment and moderation on Mr. Cotten's part, in connection with anything that bothered him which caused reactions on the part of our people, that set him off on a campaign of vilification of the Society — and especially of its staff.

* * *

And that is the crux of the problem. Mr. Cotten set out on his crusade with the ambition to become — and told me personally that he was going to become — the most important and the most widely heard radio commentator in our country on the anti-Communist side. He counted heavily on moral and financial backing from JBS members to enable him to realize that ambition. In the beginning, almost in every area, he got such support. But in each area, beginning with his home town, as our members watched him operate and learned more about him, their support fell away. This happened without any word from us, even to our field staff. So Mr. Cotten's undercover attacks on the Society became more extensive; and recently he has moved into very thinly disguised open attacks. All of which is his privilege. But since he is constantly moving into new areas, and getting strong *initial* support from our members in many such areas, we feel we should try to save such members from possible future regrets by advising them of these past experiences.

We are neither attacking nor condemning Richard Cotten. We are simply saying, on the other hand, that his active support by our members does not seem to us to be justified by either his knowledge, his experience, his judgment, his temperament, or his methods. Especially when there are so many excellent anti-Communist radio and television programs to support — like those by Dan Smoot and Dean Manion and Carl McIntire and Billy Hargis, to name just a few — for those members who have the extra dollars and energy to spare.

Sincerely,

Robert Welch